623 **Meetings and Attendance:** Above table brings out the nature of Panchayat meetings and its interest in administrative work. The Panchayat meetings form an index of their importance in administrative activities. Even in major Panchayats, the civic consciousness and sense of responsibility among the Panchayat members did not appear to be quite satisfactory. The attendance in most instances was hardly more than 50 per cent and in the majority, not even that much. Very often Panchayats had to carry on their transactions with a bare quorum. Instances where attendance was more than 60 per cent were rare. This was a poor index of their sense of local responsibility. To expect them in the face of these facts to become nurseries of democratic traditions and administrative experience appeared to be a very ambitious dream.

The Panchayat members should of course be given 3 clear day's notice, but, even when they got advance intimation, they rarely attended. There were instances of Panchayats in East Godavari and Anantpur Districts where meetings were not held for months and yet neither they were superseded nor any effective action was taken against them in spite of the provision of the Madras Local Boards Act.

If that was the state of affairs in the major Panchayats, the situation in minor Panchayats could not naturally be expected to be [578] better. There were usually party factions, village politics, group pressures, communal rivalries and these rent the village unity to a hundred shreds.

623 Superseded Panchayat Boards were also examined during the course of the investigation. The reasons for superseding a 687 Panchayat might be any one of the following: village factions, party politics, abstention from meetings, opposition to taxation, nepotism in appointments, misappropriation of public funds, harassing executive officers or other public servants, committing frauds, writing off the proper dues of Panchayats, allowing unauthorised exemption of taxtion, lower assessments and discriminatory policies towards favourites, leaving the taxes in large arrears without ever bothering to collect them, and several other unhappy practices by which, the running of administration of the Panchayat by the same body appeared to be pregnant with disaster. Such a Panchayat was superseded and a special officer was appointed to look after it for a period of one year.

Neither the grade of the Panchayat nor its previous record saved it from supersession, when it reached a stage of serious deterioration.

The supersession period was normally one year and sometimes one and a half years. Many of the irregular Panchayats were superseded more than once.

A few samples taken in the survey would illustrate the circumstances under which Panchayats were usually superseded. We shall review only a few cases as Tuni in East Godavari, Ganapavaram in West Godavari, Kantaram in Kistna, Kasimkot in Vizagapatam, Gooty, Dharmavaram and Gorantala in Anantapur, as instances of superseded Boards.

Tuni Panchayat in East Godavari was once superseded for its wanton neglect of taxation and collection of arrears in 1939.

	Current Demand	Arrears
	Rs.	Rs.
License Fees	...	103—0—0
House Tax	3587—4—0	138—0—0
Profession Tax	226-14-0	75-12—0
Public Scavenging Fees	302—1-0	...
Markets	38—4-0	3944-14—3
Cart Stands	1119-10-0	2224—5—0
Slaughter House	92—0-0	247—6—8
Sale of Rubbish	...	76—0—0
Total.	5266—1-0	8809—5-11

No coercive steps were ever taken by the Panchayat to collect this money. On the other hand these dues were written off without the consent the District Board. The Panchayat had also executed works of gravelling 7 roads in undue haste. Sanitation was neglected awfully. As a result the Board was superseded.

One Panchayat in West Godavari proved to be a notorious example of village factions. When the previous President of the Panchayat died, another came in his place, but the party of the dead President began to oppose every resolution. When the new one was thrown out and a member of the opposition party was elected, they in turn repeated the same thing in vengeance, and consequently no work could be done. Roads which were said to have been executed were proved as never laid down. Some of the lands acquired in the name of the Panchayat were misappropriated. Inspite of all the instructions from the Inspector of Local Boards and the District Panchayat Officer, the Panchayat refused to carry out their orders. Influential majority of population of the village exerted much pressure to see that the

623 Panchayat would not work under any circumstances. Ultimately it
578 was superseded.

687 In Kistna District there was a parallel instance. In one Panchayat three Presidents came in power in quick succession. When the President who was in office for 4 year resigned the Vice-President became the President. But he was thrown out and another was elected and during his term of office, the Panchayat was superseded. The cause of conflict was strong party factions. The difficulty was only one party in the village was returned into power while the other parties remained outside. So the members within the Panchayat tried to wreck it and ultimately the Board was superseded.

In Vizagapatam one Panchayat met on its own accord and began to cancel a resolution which it had passed permitting taxation on sugar pans, etc. Immediately when it was detected, the Board was superseded and a special officer was appointed, under whom the financial position had considerably improved.

Anantapur District had similar instances of Panchayats which were opposed to taxation, full of party factions, negligent in work and highly litigious. In one instance, the President of the Ex-Taluk Board was a member of the Panchayat and he was in the minority party. In the contest for the Presidential election for the Panchayat, the man from the majority party became successful. As the minority party wanted to pull down the party in power, they refused to pass the administration report, turned petromax lights to kerosene oil lights in the name of the public good and opposed vehemently any taxation The machine of the water pump system was spoiled. So the Inspector of Local Boards requested the Panchayat to add a surcharge of 12% to the house tax and provide themselves with this badly needed facility for which Government and District
687 Board gave donations. Yet the Board persisted in opposing for six
661 months postponing meetings for want of quorum, when it was finally superseded. Another minor Panchayat in Anantapur was superseded because the President and members under-assessed their houses and those of their relations.

These were instances of Panchayats getting annually an income of Rs. 200,000 where the engineer drew a much higher salary than the executive officer, but technically was a sub-ordinate to him.

623 The special officer who was put in charge was expected to bring about a uniform development in the administration of the Panchayat. He had powers to enforce fresh taxation, collect arrears and execute

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schemes of administration which were conducive to social welfare in the local areas and when once the Panchayat was rehabilitated, fresh elections were held and it was given over to the new Board. This [687] suspersession of the working of the village body by its own elected representation was considered to be a punishment for the village which did not play fair with the functions entrusted to it.

Audit of the Panchayat Boards: The major Panchayats were audited once in a year by the lower grade sub-ordinate staff of the Accountant General's Office, while the minor Panchayats were audited by the District Panchayat Officers. But the inadequacy of audit staff left the position of acounts in a very unsatisfactory state.

D. Supervision and Control: The District Boards, the District and Assistant Panchayat Officers supervised the working of the village Panchayats. Usually there was one District Panchayat Officer with one or two assistants under him in each district. As they had to do in addition to supervision, inspection work regarding elections and propaganda also, the time left at their disposal for Panchayat supervision was not much with the result several Panchayats remained uninspected for a long time.

PART III

Observations

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A. Structure: The classification with regard to the grades of Panchayats was not systematic. Panchayats which for long ceased to be in the 3rd grade and could be placed in the 2nd grade and the 2nd to 1st grade were not changed but were retained in their old grades. No attempt was ever made to regularise this procedure. There was also no proportion between the population of the Panchayats and their membership. The provision of the seats for the depressed classes, Harijans and Muslims was strictly in accordance with the proportion to their population. Women members were totally absent. Ex-officio membership of the Munsif was provided but later on was eliminated on the pretext that his co-option on the Panchayat might intensify village politics. This did not appear to be justifiable because his elimination from the Panchayat meant the loss of his useful services and those of his hereditary servants. Devoid of any share in Panchayat administration the village officials just did the revenue and police work entrusted to them and remained outside the current day to day administration of the village. The salaries paid to them and to their hereditary servants were very unattractive. Besides the Inams they

auctioned, while Government wanted them to be departmentally managed. 231

Parks for the public recreation were constructed only in a few Panchayats while the majority were indifferent. 367

Similarly market sites where fees were collected on sale of vegetables, grains or animals were mostly without stalls or sheds to shelter the sellers and buyers and the goods offered for sale. 443

Burning and burial grounds were not properly maintained either in the major or minor Panchayats. 764

Street lighting undertaken only by a few major Panchayats was left mostly to contractors who would light the streets hardly for a few hours. Panchayats did not undertake this task directly as they thought it was difficult to control and check the pilfering of kerosene oil, lights, wicks, burners, chimneys, etc. The remedy for that would be to get standardised and stamped goods for the use of Panchayats from Government Stores and to punish offenders mercilessly than to leave this function to the mercy of the contractors who would only be keen to charge the highest rates than giving proper service. 365

Provision of libraries and newspapers was undertaken only by very few Panchayats either due to lack of funds or sufficient interest. 217

Management of fairs and festivals was done by a few minor or major Panchayats, but, without exploiting their privileged position by means of a pilgrim tax or a tax on the vendors. 543

Optional functions like plantation of trees, provision of cart and bus stands, radio sets for listeners, help in epidemics, provision of dispensaries, etc. were done only by very few Panchayats. 623

The attendance of the members at the meetings of Panchayats was so irregular that there was often no quorum. Sometimes the Panchayats held no meetings at all for a long time or the members absented themslves continuously without any action being taken against them.

Panchayats were superseded and special officers were appointed to administer them for a year or two, when Panchayats could not work properly either due to local factions or opposition to taxation or any other undesirable features. Fresh Panchayat was ushered in only after the prevailing irregularities were removed and when the prospects of its smooth working were tolerably certain. 687 625

623 **D. Supervision and Control:** The District Boards, District Collectors and the Inspector of Local Boards and Municipal Councils through four Divisional Inspectors, District and Assistant Panchayat Officers supervised the work and controlled the administration of the Village Panchayats. But in practice the supervision and control exercised appeared to be very superficial. The dual control of the District Board and the District Collector led to much confusion. [652] Even the Panchayat budgets were never properly scrutinised with the result that they went on accumulating heavy opening balances as if there was no work they could undertake, thus allowing their administration to deteriorate. The District Panchayat Officers, with hardly one or two Assistant Panchayat Officers under them, could not naturally inspect all the Panchayats at least once in a year. Without increasing the number of supervisory staff and avoiding the defects of dual control, better and effective supervision of the Panchayats could not be envisaged.

While the accounts of the Minor Panchayats were audited by the District Panchayat Officers, those of the Major Panchayats were audited annually by the Local Audit Department. But the introduction of [687] auditing the accounts had not effectively improved the Panchayats and the audit remarks were never properly implemented by them as their failure to do so was not often met with any punishment.